



Testimony of  
**Melodie Peters, President**  
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Labor & Public Employees Committee  
February 26, 2013

**HB 6416 AN ACT CONCERNING STATE CHARTER SCHOOL EMPLOYEES**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak and members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee. My name is Melodie Peters and I am the President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of union of nearly 29,000 public and private sector employees including state employees, nurses, healthcare workers, teachers and other school personnel. I am here today in my capacity as Director of Organizing to testify in favor of HB 6416 An Act Concerning State Charter School Employees.

Teachers in Public schools and charter schools work under tremendous pressure. They work with fewer resources serving increasingly difficult populations under far more scrutiny than ever before.

Unlike most public schools, most charter school teachers have yet to form unions. Charter school teachers without a union can be fired at will. Their hours of work, compensation, benefits, class sizes or working conditions can be changed daily without any input from the teachers. Across the country we hear stories of Charter School Teachers coming together and joining unions and becoming partners with school administrators. When Charter School teachers organize they are able to take their experience in the classrooms to administration and collectively work to improve the learning environment.

Despite the clear benefits to forming a union still many charter school teachers are hesitant. Just like workers in any other industry, they know management does not want them to join a union and the fear of reprisal prevents them from exercising their fundamental human right to organize.

In 2007 study, Richard Freeman found that "53% of workers would form unions if they could."<sup>1</sup> The majority of them cited fear of management retaliation as their reason for not joining together. They have good reason to be concerned. In Kate Bronfenbrenner's expansive 2009 study she found that "workers were forced to attend anti-union one-on-one sessions in two thirds of union elections. In 63% of elections employers used supervisor one-on-one meetings

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<sup>1</sup> Freeman, Richard B. 2007. *Do Workers Want Unions? More Than Ever*. EPI Issue Brief #182. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute

to interrogate workers about who they or other workers supported, and in 54% used such sessions to threaten workers.”<sup>2</sup>

Under Connecticut law, charter school teachers would have to turn their union cards in to their direct supervisors, the very people who are bringing them in to these anti-union meetings. Charter school teachers have a burden no other public or private sector employee has to shoulder. Under both Federal and Connecticut labor law, employees turn over their cards to either a neutral third party or to the state or federal agency. Those cards are never seen by management and the workers are free to share or hide their support for the union as they please.

I urge you to support HB 6416 and give charter school teachers the same right to join a union free from employer intimidation that every other employee enjoys.

Thank You

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<sup>2</sup> Bronfenbrenner, Kate 2009. *No Holds Barred: The Intensification of Employer Opposition to Organizing*. EPI Issue Brief #182. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute